



From The Morning Call

Senior center project gets \$150,000

Expanded regional site in Silverdale to include banquet hall, community room.

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"This is a very nice senior center ... but it could be nicer."

That was the message U.S. Rep. James Greenwood, R-8th District, delivered to a group crowded into the Pennridge Senior Center in Perkasie on Monday when he presented a \$150,000 check toward the construction of an expanded regional center in nearby Silverdale.

The federal economic development grant brings the fund-raising effort well past the halfway mark of the projected \$1.8 million construction cost for the 9,845-square-foot building. The center on Chestnut Street has about 2,000 square feet of usable space.

State Rep. Kathy Watson, R-Bucks, said the federal grant inspired her to seek additional state money for the project.

"Jim kicked up the action," Watson told the assembled seniors and local officials. The legislator said she would work with her Republican colleague, Paul Clymer, R-Bucks, to get additional money. "We'll go back to shake some funds from Harrisburg," she said. Clymer also attended the ceremony.

The center has secured \$140,000 in state grants and about \$148,000 from local governments. In addition to the federal funds and the projected sale of the current center, foundation grants, donations from local businesses and community fund-raisers total about \$1.1 million.

In 1999, the center bought a 3.7-acre tract at Routes 133 and 152 in Silverdale for \$110,000.

Nancy Keenan, a board member of the Bucks County Association for Retired and Senior Citizens, said she has been raising money for the project for 13 years. "I think this is a prime example of local people, municipalities, businesses and state and federal governments working together to provide a valuable resource for local older citizens," she said.

Keenan said the new center would better serve its clientele in many ways.

Among the improvements she cited are handicapped accessibility, a larger function room and private



rooms for activities such as social counseling and income tax preparation. "Right now, if someone needs privacy, the director has to leave her office," Keenan said.

The new center's community room is designed to seat more than 200.

It also will have a 720-square-foot banquet hall, an area that administrators hope will serve broader community needs and generate rental income.

The center now has about 500 members. "But that doesn't tell the whole story," Keenan said. Federally funded senior centers must serve anyone who chooses to use them, she said.

A spokesman for Greenwood's office estimates that there are 6,000 senior citizens in the Pennridge area. "The senior population has really grown," Greenwood said, citing improved health and the aging of the baby boom generation as factors.

Greenwood, who apologized for being late for the presentation, quipped that he "couldn't find a parking space." Keenan said the existing center's small lot is "dangerous," with a steep slope and uneven pavement.

In addition to better parking, a larger space and improved design, the Silverdale location opens a new level of community involvement, Keenan said. The planned center's proximity to the Penn Central Middle School will spur "intergenerational programming," she said.

Keenan hopes remaining funding will come through a mortgage co-signed by municipalities in the region or a similar debt-guarantee instrument.

At its March meeting, Perkasio Borough Council endorsed the idea of a senior center for Pennridge area residents without making a financial commitment.

The borough is the first among the nine communities to endorse the idea. The other municipalities involved are Sellersville, Dublin, Silverdale, half of Telford and the townships of Hilltown, East and West Rockhill and Bedminster.

Keenan said there is no set date for construction to begin. Geoffrey F.X. O'Connell is a freelance writer.

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